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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 002293

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SUBJECT: PARTIES PAN POLLS, PLAN MAOIST DIALOGUE

REF: KATHMANDU 2229

Classified By: Ambassador James Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

1. (C) On October 19, seven party alliance leaders officially announced they would boycott municipal elections set for February 8 and would hold dialogue with Maoist rebels with the immediate objective of prolonging the Maoist's unilateral cease-fire so that a conducive atmosphere for dialogue could be created and confidence building measures could be explored. UML General Secretary MK Nepal told us that villagers supported the political parties and would join protests in large numbers. While suspicious of Maoist intentions, MK Nepal argued that parties must engage as Maoists may be ready for peace. End Summary.

Seven Party Alliance Boycotts February Municipal Elections ...

2. (U) In their first meeting following the King's holiday message announcing parliamentary elections and the date for municipal elections (reftel), seven party alliance leaders officially announced on October 19 that they would boycott municipal elections. Their statement said that the announcement of parliamentary and municipal elections was "the King's tactic to prolong his autocratic regime" and was "meaningless" in the present situation. MK Nepal told the press, "We will not only boycott the unconstitutional polls, but will not let the polls happen anywhere at any cost." The alliance announced an aggressive series of "active protest programs," including mass gatherings in all municipalities from December 11, to garner public support against the proposed municipal polls.

... And Plans Dialogue with Maoists for Peace

3. (U) In the October 19 meeting, the seven party alliance officially decided to hold dialogue with the Maoists. The alliance statement said, "We declare that special initiatives will be taken immediately for dialogue with Maoists to make the cease-fire fruitful." Amik Sherchan, Chairman of People's Front Nepal, told the media that the alliance gave responsibility in writing to top Party leaders to perform all necessary tasks for the talks. He said that the immediate objective of the dialogue was to convince Maoists to prolong their unilateral cease-fire to create a conducive atmosphere for dialogue so that confidence building measures could be explored. Party leaders said that for security reasons they would not make public the date or venue of talks, nor the names of those participating. Sherchan said, "We will assess the situation first and also may invite international observers to ensure security if deemed necessary." MK Nepal told the media that Parties would approach Maoist leaders immediately to finalize the date and place of talks which would be decided "soon."

MK Nepal: Parties Have Large Rural Base of Support ...

4. (C) MK Nepal told the Ambassador that over the recent Dasain holiday he had visited all 24 Village Development Committees (VDC) in his electoral district of Rautahat, in the Terai region of central Nepal, for the first time in years. MK Nepal reported that he found a strong base of support everywhere he visited, with 500 to 2,000 people greeting him in each VDC. Villagers told MK Nepal that they did not support the King's proposed elections and would participate in demonstrations called by the Parties. MK Nepal said that the UML would focus protests in various regional hubs, such as Biratnagar, Pokhara, and Nepalgunj, with the goal of gathering 50,000 people in each place. He hoped each local UML group would compete with neighboring UML groups and NC groups to get the most people to participate in these rallies.

... And Can't Rule Out Maoists Genuinely Want Peace

15. (C) MK Nepal also told the Ambassador that the parties remained suspicious of Maoist intentions but were continuing contact, to find out whether the Maoists were seeking peace. The UML leader believed that some Maoists were ready to give up the armed struggle, though Prachanda appeared to be taking a harder line. MK Nepal opined that the Parties should support a constituent assembly election to call the Maoists' bluff. He said that if the Maoists sequestered arms and allowed international observers, there could be elections to a constituent assembly. He argued that local party cadre could monitor Maoist actions in the villages. If Maoists did not allow cadre in villages, the Parties would know the Maoists were not sincere.

Comment

16. (C) The parties are playing with fire, hoping that if they increase pressure on the King by seeking rapprochement with the Maoists, the King will finally blink. It remains to be seen whether this gamble will pay off.
MORIARTY